

BEFORE 20 DECEMBER 1957

CITY COUNCIL ELECTION RALLY

In the heat of election battle, people and political parties tend to be side tracked onto minor and irrelevant issues. In Singapore, as you know, the habit is to do two things. First insult and denigrate your opponents. Second, promise the electorate anything and everything - the sun, the moon and the stars. You have had your fill of this and you must be pretty fed up with it. And quite rightly so.

My Party, the People's Action Party, does not wish to join the mud slinging competition. Nor do we promise you the sun, the moon and the stars. Instead we want to clarify the basic issues in the present City Council elections so that you will understand what this whole business is about.

National Archives of Singapore

As you all know, about one million people live in the City area of Singapore.

About half of these are above the age of 21. If you have lived in Singapore for more than five years, you are eligible to vote, whether or not you were born here.

Registration of voters is automatic and is done through Identity Cards. This means that nearly all adults can vote. The first point I want to make is that everyone who can should exercise the right to vote.

Why is it important that you should vote? You may say to yourself:- "I am an ordinary person. I just want to mind my own business. What does it matter to me which political party runs the City Council?"

But it does matter. There are two reasons why it does matter. First your every day life can be better or worse depending on whether the affairs of the City Council are managed well or badly. Remember the City Council supplies you with water, electricity and gas. It looks after your roads. It keeps the city clean. It licences hawkers motor-cars, taxis, lorries, buses and trishaws. Building plans and bus routes must be approved by it. To do these and many other things, it spends more than \$100 million a year. That means it spends more than \$100 a year on behalf of each one of us, man, woman and child living in the City.

It is therefore the business of each one of us to see that the affairs of the City Council are managed by honest and capable persons. We do not want a repetition of the sorry state of affairs produced by the retiring City Council.

The second reason why you should use your vote is a more basic one. The new City Council is a completely elected body. Gone are the nominated members - selected to defend vested interests or because they were friendly with Colonial officials. My party is glad to see the last of them. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

These elections therefore have a new meaning. It is an experiment in democratic local government. This is the real significance of these elections.

We all prefer a democratic system of Government to other types of government. We do not want the Colonial system because we do not want to be bossed by the white man. We do not want a dictatorship because we do not want to be bossed by any other man. But if we want the democratic system, we must be prepared to contribute to its successful working. At election time, this means that we listen to what contending parties have to say. We judge them not merely by their words. We take into account also their past performance. We assess the merits of individual candidates put up by the Party. We then decide who is worthy of our support. On polling day we cast our vote for that person and for his Party.

This sounds a simple enough, you may say. If this is all there is to this business of democracy, why make all the fuss? It is all so easy.

But the matter is not all that simple. A democratic society does not run itself automatically. It requires two things to succeed. First there must be an interested and vigilant electorate to choose, and then to control by the force of public opinion, the politicians it elects to manage country's affairs. Second a democratic society must have honest and able political parties to give it a choice of alternative leaderships.

Let me say a few words about political parties and their relationship with the public. Political parties are of two types. One type consists of a collection of individual opportunists who gang up together. Each man wants to feather his own nest. They think they can best succeed if they hunt in a pack rather than venture out as lone wolves. So they form political parties. These people give their parties fanciful names like liberal Socialist Party. They put up fake programmes which they have neither the intention nor the ability to carry out. They try to beguile you people with sweet words.

National Archives of Singapore

But one thing will prove to be their undoing. They do not trust the electorate. They are both contemptuous and, at the same time, frightened of the mass of ordinary people. Listen to these words: "The masses who have the right to vote by virtue of automatic registration, are the illiterate, uncultured and unreasonable. They

cannot distinguish between right and wrong. Their thoughts seem to run in the groove of erroneous thinking".

No, this is not a quotation from Hitler or Mussolini. It comes from the October, 1956 issue of "The Torch" organ of the Liberal Socialist Party. So when you listen to what the Lib-Socs say, remember that, that is what they really think of you:- That you are illiterate, uncultured and unreasonable and that you cannot distinguish right from wrong. We of the P.A.P. know that you can distinguish right from wrong. And that is why you are going to give the Lib-Socs next Saturday the same crushing defeat you gave their predecessors, the Progressives in the last elections.

The other type of political party is motivated by principles and ideals about how a just society should run. It works not to advance the personal ambitions of adventurers but to create a more just social order than the one we now have. It is outraged by the many injustices so clear to everyone but the privileged few. It wants to reform society. Its inspiration is the vision of the good and happy life for all and not for a lucky few entrenched in privileged positions.

It is this type of political party that will be the dynamic force in a democratic society. And so, citizens of Singapore, you have to make up your mind which

parties belong to the first type, consisting of opportunists rogues scoundrels and vagabonds. And which party works for a purpose and an ideal.

One last word. When you cast your vote, you might as well do so for a strong and effective party. Here I may say something to the English-educated classes of Singapore. We have been missing you at our P.A.P. mass-meetings. On the other hand by not being present, you have no idea of the strength of our mass support. We are holding our last campaign meeting on the evening of Friday, 20th December, in Hong Lim Green, opposite the District and Police Courts in South Bridge Road. All our P.A.P. candidates for the City Council Election will be there to address the meeting. Please turn up if you have the time. We have a little surprise for you. Good-night.

LEE KUAN YEW
National Archives of Singapore